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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001027

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: KARAMANLIS RESPONDS TO GRUEVSKI
LETTER ON MINORITIES

REF: A. ATHENS 1009
[1](#)B. SKOPJE 461

ATHENS 00001027 001.7 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard for 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis has responded in a July 18 public letter (full text in para 4) to the July 14 letter from Macedonian Prime Minister Gruevski (ref A) in which Gruevski asks that Greece address issues related to property restitution and citizenship of ethnic Macedonians who left Greece following the Second World War and that Greece recognize the Macedonian minority in Greece. Key points in the Karamanlis letter are:

-- Greece is committed to reaching a solution to the name issue, and "regrets" the fact that the Gruevski letter was sent "at this critical moment in the negotiating effort;"

-- The Gruevski letter raises "non-existent and unsubstantiated issues" that "aim at interfering in the domestic affairs of a neighboring state" and "deviate from the objectives of the ongoing negotiations."

-- There is "no 'Macedonian' minority in Greece," and allegations that one exists "are totally unfounded, politically motivated, and disrespectful of . . . historic realities."

-- As to property issues, individuals should pursue such claims through the judicial process.

-- Karamanlis also closes with a zinger: that history judges leaders by how the "rise to the challenge and assume their responsibilities" and "much will depend" on Gruevski's "positive attitude and constructive spirit."

COMMENT: WHY THE FUSS?

[1](#)2. (C) Karamanlis, reply is indicative of Greek views of the name issue itself and the extreme irritation in the government and among the Greek population that PM Gruevski has raised one of Greece's most sensitive issues -- minority issues in Greece -- in the context of the name negotiations. Although Karamanlis likely feels strongly about these issues on a personal basis (hailing from Greek Macedonia), his letter is also reflective of deep Greek societal attitudes about both issues. Greek unwillingness to acknowledge any minority in Greece other than the "Muslim Minority," as defined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, is reflective of

long-term Greek concern about irredentism from various other populations who have -- in the past -- held or sought to hold territory that forms part of modern Greece. Modern Greece consolidated its final borders after the Second World War; immediately after, Greece fought a civil war in which certain elements supported annexation of parts of Northern Greece (parts of "Greek Macedonia") to part of Tito's Yugoslavia or a puppet state controlled by Yugoslavia. From a Greek perspective, parts of the outer ring of today's Greece is still subject to irredentist claims. Therefore, most Greeks do not believe that they can take their current territory for granted, and they see ethnic identifications as a potential "5th column" which could make irredentist claims in the future.

13. (C) Our Greek interlocutors are also deeply suspicious about the timing of PM Gruevski's letter. Per ref B, Embassy Skopje reports that PM Gruevski was discomfited that peripheral issues favorable to Greece had emerged in the various ideas being floated by UN envoy Nimetz, and that he chose to respond by raising these issues. Some Greek interlocutors appear to believe that Gruevski wanted to create a dynamic where Greece could not make compromises leading the international community to blame Greece for failed negotiations. Regardless of perceived motivation, Gruevski's letter has had the effect of Greece digging in on minority issues in a public and definitive way, and it has caused Athens to question further Gruevski as a negotiating partner. SEPTTEL will provide our thoughts on where the Greeks are in the name negotiations and how we might foster progress. End Comment.

TEXT OF PM KARAMANLIS' LETTER

ATHENS 00001027 002 OF 002

14. (U) BEGIN TEXT

Mr. Prime Minister,

As you are aware for the last fifteen years Greece and your country, pursuant to the relevant decisions of the UN Security Council, have committed themselves to negotiations in the framework of the United Nations regarding the name issue which "needs to be resolved in the interest of the maintenance of peaceful and good neighbourly relations in the region" as stipulated by the Security Council in Resolution 817 to the promotion of friendly and good relations with all its neighbouring countries, especially with the countries of the Western Balkans, and the creation of the necessary conditions that will allow them to join, in the near future, the Euro-Atlantic and European families.

Greece, since 1993 has demonstrated good will, under the auspices of the U.N., to find a mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, which would take into consideration the legitimate interests and sensitivities of both our countries. This is within the mandate of the relevant U.N. Security Council Resolutions, but also the wish of all countries participating in the Euro-atlantic and European institutions as was also unequivocally stated in the Bucharest NATO Summit and in the EU European Council in Brussels respectively.

Mr. Prime Minister, your letter far from promoting the negotiations and the good neighbourly relations with my country raises a number of non-existent and unsubstantiated issues that militate against the strenuous efforts made by Greece. It also aims at interfering in the domestic affairs of a neighbouring state and deviates from the objectives of the ongoing negotiations.

There is no "Macedonian" minority in Greece. There never has been. In this respect, any allegations regarding the existence of such a minority are totally unfounded,

politically motivated and disrespectful of the historic realities of the Region. As for any properties issue, any individual could make use of any legal recourse before the Courts, including the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Mr. Prime Minister,

Times have changed. I am convinced that the future of the Balkan countries lies within the European and Euroatlantic institutions and not in nationalist formulas of a bygone era which must be left behind once and for all. Greece remains firmly committed to working towards that goal.

History judges leaders by how they rise to the challenge and assume their responsibilities. Much will depend on your positive attitude and constructive spirit.

END TEXT
SPECKHARD